



United States Mission to the OSCE

Reply to Ambassador Rupnik, Head of Center, Almaty

Delivered by Deputy Representative Douglas A. Davidson
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 31, 2003

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I, too, should like to begin by warmly welcoming Ambassador Rupnik to the Permanent Council and also by thanking him for his report, an admirable effort especially when one considers how brief his time has been on the job.

The United States is very satisfied with the work the Center in Almaty has undertaken, and we support fully its substantive priorities. We note that the Kazakh authorities have demonstrated a willingness to work cooperatively with the Center, and it seems natural that this cooperation should deepen and intensify.

Such cooperation is particularly important since many changes in Kazakhstan must take place simultaneously. Economic reform, for instance, cannot take place without political reform. Neither domestic nor foreign investors want to work in an environment where contracts are unenforceable, property rights not respected, conflict of interest rampant, and bribery the only way to make a bureaucracy work..

In this regard we applaud the Center's work to promote successful implementation of new, business-related legislation, and specialized training to increase the professional capacity of the economic courts.

The Center is also doing important work on the political front and in the human dimension. While we are glad to see that seven of eleven political parties registered successfully under the terms of the new 2002 law on political parties, we are concerned that the new law effectively demobilized eight other parties that were active last year, but that do not meet the new, stricter, conditions for registration.

Recognizing the importance of political pluralism for a secure and stable Kazakhstan, we were therefore pleased to hear that Mrs. Balieva, the Chairperson of the Central Election Commission, reassured the Chairman in Office during his visit that all OSCE recommendations have been taken into account in the new draft election law.

We look forward to seeing the implementation of an election law that will enable Kazakhstan to conduct free and fair elections.

Mr. Chairman, like the European Union, we remain concerned about continued legal action against the media, and in particular the closure of the opposition newspaper SOLDAT, solely on the grounds that its registration was improper.

Stifling free expression and thwarting political party development is not sustainable in the long term. Moreover, such policies often produce far more problems than they hope to avoid. We welcome, therefore, the important work that the Center and the staff of the Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media have done to review the draft mass media law, and we urge the Government of Kazakhstan to incorporate their recommendations in its upcoming legislation.

Similarly, we welcome the considerable work that ODIHR has put into reviewing the draft law on NGOs. We are especially concerned that previous drafts, if adopted, might have a negative effect on civil society.

Freedom of association, after all is an essential component of any modern society, and we urge the Government of Kazakhstan to incorporate ODIHR's recommendations in any upcoming legislation.

Ambassador Rupnik, has noted in his report Kazakhstan's stated desire to compete for the OSCE Chairmanship in office in 2009. We see this as Kazakhstan's firm commitment to continue on the path of reform, essential as a basis for serious consideration of its candidacy.

It is also an opportunity for Kazakhstan to make real use of the resource at its disposal, and -- that is, of course, the OSCE office in Almaty.

The Center's ultimate aim is to help Kazakhstan along its path of reform. Kazakhstan's interest in the Chairmanship should, as Ambassador Rupnik noted, stimulate both sides to increase their engagement.

Full involvement and wholehearted support of the Center will, we firmly believe, help Kazakhstan achieve the democratic transformation necessary to become a viable candidate for the OSCE Chairmanship. Finally, let me simply say how glad we are to have Ambassador Rupnik in Almaty. We wish him all the best in his future endeavors.

Thank you.